The Partnership with Older People in Suffolk

Expecting the Unexpected

Sharing experiences and suggestions on managing life changing events

Framlingham ‘Talkabout’ Interim Report

Discussion date 7th November 2013
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Partnership with Older People in Suffolk (POPS) organises group forums around the county to discuss and make recommendations on key issues that affect older people in order to inform service delivery in health and social care.

The Framlingham Forum was held in November 2013 and was the third discussion around older people’s experiences of managing life changing events. The forum was titled ‘Expecting the Unexpected’. 33 people attended; age range 50 – 89 with 76% female and 24% male.

A range of organisations and representatives were also present including Suffolk County Council, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council, Age UK Suffolk, Healthwatch Suffolk, Suffolk Family Carers, Suffolk Careline, Suffolk Independent Living, Framlingham Town Council and The Alzheimers Society.

The recommendations made by the group were:

1. Assistance in moving home decisions a ‘single point of contact’, who is a specialist in housing options, should be available to support, advise and or assist with all aspects of moving home. This should include dealing with utility companies, loft/house clearance, packing/unpacking etc.
2. To support preparing for retirement pre-retirement courses or events should be available which include support with pension forms, information about post retirement options e.g. volunteering, information on local community groups and activities to get involved in and information regarding the importance of maintaining good health and keeping active.
3. Health professionals need to be more aware about the support available within communities after a health issue and should actively signpost to support within communities.
4. Older people need to be aware of the support available from the police service to maintain their home and personal safety. The police service should maintain a high profile where possible. More availability of information such as victim support for people who have been a victim of a crime.

The recommendations from this forum mirror the recommendations from the previous Suffolk Older Peoples Council mini Forum, highlighting a real common need for support during life changing events.
An ‘action group’ will be developed and supported by Age UK Suffolk with older people in Framlingham to consider, highlight and implement, where possible, recommendations made in the report. A final POPS countywide summary report on ‘Expecting the Unexpected’ will be written in April 2014 looking at key points from all of the forums held this year.

The next POPS forum will be held in Stanton on the 19th March 2014 and will explore the topic further.

For information regarding previous POPS report visit: www.ageuk.org.uk/suffolk/about-age-uk-suffolk/partnership-with-older-people-in-suffolk-pops/

To keep up to date with continuing developments and future POPS forums follow Age UK Suffolk on:

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*The photos used in this report were taken at the Framlingham Talkabout event*

**INTRODUCTION**

The third forum for the 2013–2014 programme titled ‘Expecting the Unexpected’, looking at older peoples’ experience of managing life changing events was held in Framlingham. 33 people attended; the age range was 50 – 89 with 76% female and 24% male participants.

Framlingham is a market town in the Suffolk Coastal District, commonly referred to as "Fram" by the locals. The population of Framlingham is 4744 with 24%(1148 people) being over 65 (data sourced from: http://www.suffolkobservatory.info) Framlingham is serviced by a variety of independent stores, Primary and High School and college, GP practice, Hairdressers, Post Office, takeaway venues and a library. There is a variety of community groups available for older people to meet.
SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION FEEDBACK

Moving home

50% of attendees had experience of moving home in later life and 19% were thinking about moving.

Information required to make moving home easier

To make moving easier for older people attendees felt that the following types of information needed to be available:

- **Housing Options** i.e. council, private, sheltered and warden assisted etc and the layout of possible future properties
- **Practical moving advice** including help with choosing a solicitor, financial advice, removals, disposal of excess furniture if downsizing and help to arrange utilities etc
- **Community information** including the facilities available locally, transport available, nearest GP surgery, community groups etc.

Attendees did not know where they would be able to access the information they needed. The places where they would like information to be available from are:

- District Councils
- Estate Agents
- Housing Schemes
- The Library
- GP Surgeries
- Local Magazines
- The internet
- Friends and family
- Community groups
- Welcome packs available to people moving to the area.

Choosing a home

85% of attendees said that they are unaware of the different types of housing options available to them.

To improve awareness of the options available the attendees identified the need for a ‘one stop shop’ where they could talk to somebody face to face. One attendee referred to moving as a jigsaw saying that "We all know parts of the jigsaw but not
Attendees felt that there is a need for Councils, sheltered housing schemes and local Estate Agents to provide information, help and support through the whole process of moving home.

**57% of attendees felt that older people do not think about their future needs when moving home.**

Attendees identified that people need to be educated earlier about the importance of choosing the ‘right’ future long term home but they also recognised that people don’t always like to think ahead, they live in the ‘now’.

**The Move**

Attendees were asked to think about the issues that older people face when considering moving home. These are areas that they felt they would need support with:

- Getting packed and arranging removals
- Disposing of unwanted furniture when downsizing
- Will making
- Cancelling utilities and getting connected at the new property
- Budgeting for the new property and managing the cost of moving.

It was recognised by attendees that moving house can be very stressful and upsetting. Adapting to a new community and surroundings can take time. Attendees felt that it would help with the settling in process if help was available to familiarise yourself with the area, and to know what services were available locally.

To make moving home easier for older people attendees felt the process should be tailored for individuals with someone available to go through the whole moving process with them, including advice on housing options.

**The Location**

**78% of attendees felt that older people do consider the location when they are looking to move.**

Attendees felt that a good ‘location’ for an older person to move to needed to have the following:

- A GP Surgery
- A variety of local activities and community groups
- Good local transport
- Local church
- Local shops providing everyday essentials with walking distance
- Somewhere to go to for a coffee and to meet friends
- Open spaces to walk safely
- Good neighbour scheme.
Attendees felt that communities can help to make older people feel more at home and help them to settle in the community by:

- Providing a welcome pack containing local information and a map
- Having a local magazine
- Members of local community groups could visit and invite people to join
- Local community police service should call to offer support
- Local pharmacists identifying new patients and encouraging them to integrate with the community.

Attendees commented that it needs to be a ‘two way street’ and when people move to a new area; individuals need to ensure that they make themselves known to the community as soon as possible to prevent them from becoming isolated.

**Health issues**

*71% of attendees had experienced a life changing health issue. 80% had experienced difficulty in accessing info about the immediate support available.*

When dealing with health issues that have a life changing effect there can be both immediate and longer term needs for support.

**Immediate needs**

Attendees felt that initial support was offered by their GP, family/friends, local chemists, scheme managers in sheltered accommodation, Age UK Suffolk and the internet. It was recognised that it can be difficult to find out about the support that is available in a new area. Attendees felt that older people do not like to bother their GP and to ask for help. Attendees commented that “Some people feel a burden and don’t ask for help” and “People are too proud to ask for help”.

To make information more accessible attendees felt that it needs to be relevant, easy to understand and available from:

- GP Surgeries offering information talks
- Pharmacy
- Telephone helpline
- Community Centre
- Local clubs and groups through talks/speakers
- Framfare (local magazine)
- Local mailings.
- Libraries
Longer Term needs

63% felt the health issue had had a long lasting impact on their life

Health issues can have lasting effects for older people and attendees identified these as possible side effects:

- Reduced mobility
- Memory loss
- Isolation
- Fear
- Loss of confidence
- Communication difficulties
- Reduction in manual dexterity
- The need to adjust your diet.

With health issues that have a long lasting impact, attendees recognised that many people do not get back to their ‘normal self’ after the event and felt that in these instances older people simply adapt to deal with their new circumstances. Attendees commented that “I can’t do what I want to”, “Life is not the same”, “I haven’t got back to my ‘normal self’, conditions gets worse as I get older”

91% of attendees felt that older people face difficulties in getting information about support available to people with long term health issues.

To enable older people to cope with long term life changing health issues attendees identified that there needs to be ongoing support with practical issues like housework and shopping. Transport needs to be available to enable them to get to hospital and GP appointments without having to rely on friends and families. Attendees recognised that having someone with knowledge of the specific medical conditions who can talk about the condition, listen to any worries or concerns and explain how to access on-going support as needed would be beneficial. Events in the community were also highlighted by attendees as a good way to raise awareness and encourage people to support each other.

Attendees felt that information about long term support should be available from:

- GP Surgeries
- Hospital staff
- Pharmacists
- Age UK Suffolk
- Suffolk Family Carers
- Library
- Local magazines (Framfare).

Retirement
80% of the attendees had already retired and of the 20% that hadn’t 50% were thinking about retirement. 93% of attendees felt that they had experience difficulty in accessing information before they retired.

**Before retirement**

Attendees felt that they would have benefitted from more information being available to them prior to commencing retirement.

The information they required could be split into two distinct categories – financial and social:

**Financial advice and support**

- Pension forecasts to enable you to plan ahead
- Entitlements to benefits and grants
- Debt advice
- Help with form completion including pensions, bus passes and benefits.

**Social**

- Volunteering opportunities
- Social activities available locally
- The importance of keeping active
- Skills to cope with the change of life style
- Emotional support to enable you to cope with loneliness due to loss of work friends.

**Provided by**

- Department for work and pensions
- Individual companies/ employers
- Locally run work shops
- Financial institutes i.e. banks
- Age UK Suffolk
- Information supplied through the media
- County and district councils
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Online

One attendee said that “It’s a rude awakening when you have less money”.

Attendees also felt that having the option to reduce your working hours leading up to retirement would make adapting to retirement easier. One attendee commented “Decreasing your hours gradually would be good so it is not too much of a shock when you leave fully.”

Attendees felt that it would be beneficial to have pre-retirement planning courses that cover emotional, financial and practical issues. One attendee commented “You don’t know what to expect and need advice; it would be a good idea to have a pre-retirement course.”
Attendees felt that these could be held over several months leading up to retirement. This should be either in their current workplace, depending on the size of the organisation, or as an information event/conference held locally. There was the recognition that these courses would need to be held at least once a year to capture anyone retiring in that 12 month period.

Using the media to advertise the importance of retirement planning with advice on how to seek help and support was felt by attendees as a good way to encourage people to look for advice.

**After retirement**

When adapting to retirement attendees experiences were very different with some saying that it took no time at all to adjust and that they enjoyed retirement immediately. Others, however, felt that it took a long time as they missed their work friends and the lively environment. If you have someone to share your retirement with it was felt that it is easier than if you are on your own. Comments made by attendees regarding retirement were: “I remember feeling useless when I retired”, “You can get very lonely after retirement”, “Feeling of loss, my role has completely changed” and “It’s not a natural progression for some people.”

**Making the most of retirement**

In order to make the most of retirement attendees felt that they needed to have continuing information regarding:

- Financial advice including understanding how to manage your money
- Information about social activities available locally
- Transport available locally
- Health advice including the importance of a healthy diet and remaining active.

**Being a victim of burglary, scam, crime, hate crime**

*40% of attendees had had some personal experience of crime.*

The crimes attendees had experienced were:

- Car vandalism
- Damage to garden
- Having a handbag stolen
- Burglary.
When attendees had experienced a crime they initially sought help from their local police service, other than this, all attendees were unsure where to go for information and support.

To raise awareness of the support available attendees felt that:

- Police Community Support Officers need to visit local community groups delivering preventions and safety talks. It was recognised that this does already happen in Framlingham
- Police support in the community needs to be very visible
- There needs to be a raised awareness of the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme
- A local leaflet detailing the community support should be available
- A business card with relevant support telephone numbers to keep by the phone would be useful
- Local magazines and newspapers should be used to promote crime prevention awareness
- Local libraries should hold information days and supplies of support leaflets.

Of the attendees who had experience of a crime, 73% felt that it had had a long lasting impact on their life. Some felt that they have never fully recovered and regained their confidence, now feeling insecure and vulnerable. Attendees were also more aware of locking doors and windows securely and leaving a light on in their home.

One attendee who had experienced a burglary in the home stated that it had left them feeling worried, suspicious and contaminated. It had impacted on their sleep and eventually they felt they had no option but to move home, which is ultimately what they did.

**94% of people who had experienced a crime felt that longer term support was needed.**

Attendees were not aware of the service that Victim Support provides or how to access their help. They felt that one-to-one counselling should be offered and followed up with support from someone in the community to offer continual reassurance.
The recommendations made by the group were:

5. Assistance in moving home decisions a 'single point of contact', who is a specialist in housing options, should be available to support, advise and or assist with all aspects of moving home. This should include dealing with utility companies, loft/house clearance, packing/unpacking etc.
6. To support preparing for retirement pre-retirement courses or events should be available which include support with pension forms, information about post retirement options e.g. volunteering, information on local community groups and activities to get involved in and information regarding the importance of maintaining good health and keeping active.
7. Health professionals need to be more aware about the support available within communities after a health issue and should actively signpost to support within communities.
8. Older people need to be aware of the support available from the police service to maintain their home and personal safety. The police service should maintain a high profile where possible. More availability of information such as victim support for people who have been a victim of a crime.

Next Stage
An ‘action group’ will be developed and supported by Age UK Suffolk with the older people in Framlingham to consider and implement, where possible, recommendations made in the report.